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SUBJECT: Scenesetter/Visit of Baden-Wuerttemberg M-P Oettinger

Sensitive but unclassified; not for internet distribution.

[11.](#) (U) SUMMARY: On November 14-15, Baden-Wuerttemberg Minister-President Guenther Oettinger (CDU/Christian Democrats) will make his first official visit to Washington. A political moderate, Oettinger leads one of Germany's largest and economically most successful states. Oettinger is favored to win re-election in March 2006. END SUMMARY.

Baden-Wuerttemberg: An Economic Powerhouse

[12.](#) (U) Baden-Wuerttemberg (Germany's third-largest state) has the world's 17th largest economy with a larger GDP (EUR 307 billion/2002) than most European Union members including Belgium, Sweden, and Austria. The state's per-capita GDP (EUR 28,900) is surpassed in the EU only by Luxembourg, Denmark, and Ireland. Home to DaimlerChrysler, Porsche, and Bosch (the world's largest automotive supplier), the state is one of the world's leading centers for automotive technology and production. The state also claims to be Europe's leading region for high technology (its four counties Stuttgart, Tuebingen, Karlsruhe, and Freiburg rank first, third, fourth and seventh respectively among Europe's high-tech production and development sites according to Eurostat).

Focus on Strengthening Ties to the U.S.

[13.](#) (SBU) In a recent meeting with the Consul General, Oettinger reiterated his commitment to improving German-American relations and criticized the foreign policy of the outgoing Schroeder government. Oettinger said that for 60 years, the transatlantic partnership and European integration were twin pillars of German foreign policy; under Schroeder, the GOG had allowed its relationship with the U.S. to deteriorate and had undermined European unity by over-emphasizing relations with France and Russia. Oettinger expressed hope that a CDU-led government would improve relations with all of Germany's neighbors and renew the transatlantic friendship.

Political Background

[14.](#) (SBU) Like neighboring Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg has had conservative governments for decades. In April 2005, Oettinger became Minister-President (analogous to a U.S. governor, but with influence on the federal level as well). Oettinger has good ties to Chancellor-designate Angela Merkel and political insiders expect Oettinger to be active on the national level. Privately, Oettinger has expressed concern that a grand coalition government will be unstable since a weakened SPD could still change tack and threaten to form a "red/red/green" coalition with the Greens and the far-left.

[15.](#) (U) Voters in Baden-Wuerttemberg will go to the polls on March 26, 2006. Observers favor Oettinger's CDU/Free Democrat (FDP) coalition government for re-election. Seen as a middle-of-the-road, modernizing voice within the party, Oettinger aims to make inroads into urban constituents who now vote for Green or SPD candidates. Oettinger is a tactician rather than an ideologue; as early as 1992, he suggested that the CDU could go into coalition with the Greens.

Visit to the U.S.

[16.](#) (U) Oettinger seeks to strengthen the state's economic and cultural ties to the United States. Oettinger -- who was quick to offer aid in the wake of Hurricane Katrina -- is avidly pro-American (as a young conservative, he toured the U.S. as part of an International Visitor program for promising German leaders). From November 13-18, he will travel with a 70-member delegation to Washington, New York, and Detroit. The trip will highlight the state's large investments in the United States; Oettinger recently noted that automotive suppliers including Bosch, ZF (Zahnradfabrik Friedrichshafen, a transmission producer), and Behr (air conditioners) are planning to double their production in the U.S. The auto industry is a focal point for the trip (NOTE: Oettinger is a close confidante of incoming

DaimlerChrysler CEO Dieter Zetsche -- END NOTE).

17. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Berlin.

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